

THE ROLE OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF HEALTH*

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THE New York Academy of Medicine and the medical profession of the City of New York have long had a deep and active interest in the establishment of a Museum of Medicine and Public Health in this city which might serve the City, the State and the Nation. Although many have recognized the need, special credit must be given to Dr. D. Bryson Delavan, a distinguished physician of this city, who persistently and ardently advocated its consideration over a long period of years. By 1927 his persistence had convinced Dr. Linsly R. Williams, then director of The New York Academy of Medicine, that the initiation of this project was one of the public responsibilities of the Academy.

In the year 1927, the Council of the Academy authorized the President of the Academy to appoint a special committee for the purpose of studying and stimulating the establishment of such a museum. The first committee appointed in 1928 included Dr. Williams, Dr. B. Sachs, Dr. John A. Hartwell and Dr. E. H. L. Corwin. In 1933 a larger special committee on museum was created of which I have had the privilege of serving as chairman. It was hoped that the gradual accumulation of material for the proposed museum might ultimately result in encouraging the interest and the financial support of philanthropic foundations, of people of means and of the municipality. In the absence of more adequate storage and exhibition space in the Academy building it was decided to restrict the collection at first to material having a bearing upon the history and development of medicine. The main purpose, however, was not neglected, namely, to interest both governmental and private support for a museum of medicine and public health to serve the medical profession and the public. With this idea in mind, a conference was held at the Academy in 1931 between the Academy's Committee on Public Health

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Relations and representatives of the American Public Health Association in the hope that these two organizations might collaborate; and when Rockefeller Center was under construction there was some hope for a time that space might be provided.

At that time we had in mind a museum which would combine the best elements of the popular Hygienic Museum of Dresden with which I had been impressed in 1912 and the more scientific Wellcome Museum of London. It was our belief that, like New York's Museum of Natural History, a popular museum for health education must have the best professional leadership and a substantial scientific working background so that it might maintain the highest standards of scientific accuracy and progress and not degenerate into mere cheap and unmeritorious showmanship.

Five years ago, shortly after the inauguration of Mr. LaGuardia as Mayor of the City of New York, I had an opportunity to bring this subject to his attention. With his usual quickness of perception, he immediately grasped the significance to health education of a great museum, like our Museum of Natural History but devoted to problems of health and disease. Sometime in 1935, I was again called to see him. He told me in confidence of the news which had not yet been made public, that a World's Fair in New York City was under consideration. He reminded me of our previous conversation concerning a museum of medicine and public health and asked me to prepare a short brief on the subject which he might advance as one of the worthy reasons for holding a World's Fair in New York. It was his idea that a great non-commercial exhibit on medicine and public health should be created in such a manner and so comprehensively that it might serve as the nucleus for the future permanent museum which I had proposed to him. In this way, he suggested, our hopes might come to realization at the termination of the Fair in 1940, far sooner than we had dared to hope.

I then consulted with the officers of the Academy of Medicine and with Dr. Louis I. Dublin, recently president of the American Public Health Association. At his instigation, Dr. Victor Heiser and Mr. Homer Calver of the American Public Health Association met with me and assisted in preparing the brief. This brief and the continued interest of Mayor LaGuardia and Mr. George McAneny resulted in the appointment of the small working committee which developed this great project, the Medical and Public Health Building of New York's World Fair,

which we dedicate today, with the self sacrificing assistance of several hundred experts in all branches of medicine and public health. The composition of this small executive committee indicates how successful has been the collaboration of the three major participating interests, the City of New York, the medical profession and the field of public health. The interest of the City is represented on the committee by the Commissioners of Health and of Hospitals, the public health association by three representatives, the medical profession by four representatives, among whom I have had the privilege of representing The New York Academy of Medicine. The board of directors of the permanent American Museum of Health is now composed in a similar fashion, except that it includes distinguished citizens in addition to the city government and the major local and national organizations representing public health and medicine.

I speak not only on behalf of The New York Academy of Medicine, but also for the entire medical profession of the City of New York and for its five medical schools in assuring you of our continued devotion to this great enterprise. We fervently believe that it will be the center from which will emanate the developing techniques of health education for the people of our City and the Nation. To this center will come hundreds of physicians and public health officers for training in the modern methods of health education, and it will share its accumulating store of rich experience and its wealth of technical material with all the health and welfare agencies of the land.